

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

5 1. A palmtop computer system comprising a processor, a memory
unit, and a plurality of illuminatable hard buttons controlled by said processor,
said memory unit coupled to said processor and including instructions that,
when executed by said processor, selectively illuminate ones of said hard
buttons to convey information to a user that relates to a function that is
10 performed when said hard button is pressed.

10 2. A palmtop computer system as described in Claim 1 wherein each
of said hard buttons includes a contoured region that is contoured in the shape
of a symbol that represents a primary function that is performed when said hard
15 button is pressed.

15 3. A palmtop computer system as described in Claim 1 wherein said
hard buttons can be illuminated in a plurality of different colors, and wherein the
color in which ones of said hard buttons are illuminated conveys further
20 information to a user.

 4. A palmtop computer system as described in Claim 1 wherein the
illumination of said hard buttons is programmable.

5. A palmtop computer system as described in Claim 1 wherein said hard buttons can be illuminated in a plurality of different colors, and wherein the color in which ones of said hard buttons are illuminated conveys further information to a user.

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6. In a palmtop computer system, a method for conveying information to a user comprising the steps of:

a) providing a hard button that is operable to perform a primary function, said hard button having a contoured region formed therein that is contoured in the shape of a symbol that represents said primary function;

b) providing at least one light source, said light source located such that, when said light source is illuminated, light is emitted through said contoured region so as to illuminate said hard button; and

c) selectively illuminating said hard button to communicate information to a user of said palmtop computer system that relates to a function that is performed when said hard button is pressed.

7. A method as described in Claim 6 wherein color of said light emitted through said contoured region communicates further information to said user that relates to said primary function.

8. A method as described in Claim 7 wherein color of said light emitted through said contoured region communicates further information to said user that relates to a secondary function.

9. A method as described in Claim 6 wherein said primary function is initiation of a date book application, and wherein step c) further comprises the step of:

5 c1) illuminating said hard button when a date book alert occurs.

10. A method as described in Claim 6 wherein said primary function is initiation of an address book application, and wherein step c) further comprises the step of:

10 c1) illuminating said hard button when a call is missed.

11. A method as described in Claim 10 further comprising the step of:

d) displaying the address book entry relating to the sender of said missed call when said hard button pressed while said hard button is illuminated.

12. A method as described in Claim 6 wherein said primary function is an up function, and wherein step c) further comprises the step of:

c1) illuminating said hard button when a user can scroll up within a particular application.

13. A method as described in Claim 6 wherein said primary function is a down function, and wherein step c) further comprises the step of:

c1) illuminating said hard button when a user can scroll down within a particular application.

14. A method as described in Claim 6 wherein said primary function is initiation of a to-do application that is operable to generate a to-do list, and wherein step c) further comprises the step of:

5 c1) illuminating said hard button when a due date for an item on said to-do list has passed, said hard button illuminated in a color that indicates the priority of said item on said to-do list.

15. A method as described in Claim 6 wherein said primary function is initiation of a memo function, and wherein step c) further comprises the step of:

10 c1) illuminating said hard button when a short message service message has been received, said hard button illuminated in a color that indicates priority of said received message.

15 16. A method as described in Claim 15 further comprising the step of:

16 d) displaying said short message service message when said hard button is pressed while said hard button is illuminated.

20 17. A method as described in Claim 6 wherein said hard button is programmable to perform functions other than said primary function, and wherein said hard button is selectively illuminated to indicate actions that can be taken by a user.

25 18. A method as described in Claim 6 wherein said hard button is programmable to perform functions other than said primary function, and

wherein said hard button is selectively illuminated to indicate actions that should be taken by a user.

19. In a palmtop computer system, a method for conveying information to a user comprising the steps of:

a) providing a first hard button that is operable to initiate operation of a date book application, said first hard button having a contoured region formed therein that is contoured in the shape of a symbol that represents said date book application;

b) illuminating said contoured region of said first hard button when a date book alert occurs;

c) providing a second hard button that is operable to initiate operation of an address book application, said second hard button having a contoured region formed therein that is contoured in the shape of a symbol that represents said address book application;

d) illuminating said contoured region of said second hard button when a call is missed;

e) providing a third hard button that is operable to initiate operation of a to-do application that generates a to-do list, said third hard button having a contoured region formed therein that is contoured in the shape of a symbol that represents said to-do application; and

f) illuminating said third hard button when a due date for an item on said to-do list has passed.

20. A method as described in Claim 19 further comprising the step of:

g) providing a fourth hard button that is operable to initiate operation of a memo application, said fourth hard button having a contoured region formed therein that is contoured in the shape of a symbol that represents said memo application; and

h) illuminating said fourth hard button when a short message service message has been received.

21. A method as described in Claim 20 further comprising the step of:

i) displaying said short message service message when said fourth hard button is pressed while said fourth hard button is illuminated, the color in which said fourth hard button is illuminated indicating the priority of said received message.

22. A method as described in Claim 21 further comprising the steps of:

j) providing a fifth hard button that is operable to perform an up function, said fifth hard button having a contoured region formed therein that is contoured in the shape of a symbol that represents said up function;

k) illuminating said fifth hard button when a user can scroll up within a particular application;

l) providing a sixth hard button that is operable to perform a down function, said sixth hard button having a contoured region formed therein that is contoured in the shape of a symbol that represents said down function; and

m) illuminating said sixth hard button when a user can scroll down within a particular application.

23. A method as described in Claim 19 wherein step b) further comprises the steps of:

b1) illuminating said first hard button in a first color to indicate a first meeting reminder;

b2) illuminating said first hard button in a second color to indicate a second meeting reminder; and

b3) illuminating said first button in a third color to indicate a third meeting reminder.

24. A method as described in Claim 19 wherein step c) further comprises the step of:

d1) displaying the address book entry relating to the sender of said missed call when said second button is pressed while said second button is illuminated.

25. A method as described in Claim 19 wherein said third button is illuminated in a color that indicates the priority of said item on said to-do list.

26. A method as described in Claim 19 wherein said first hard button and said second hard button and said third hard button are selectively illuminated to indicate actions that can be taken.

27. A method as described in Claim 19 wherein said first hard button and said second hard button and said third hard button are selectively illuminated to indicate actions that should be taken.

5 28 The method of Claim 19 wherein said method further comprises the step of:

g) providing a programmable application that is operable to control illumination of said first hard button and said second hard button and said third hard button.

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